(c) whether the aforesaid guidelines would include the activities of the Agro-based Plantation Companies some of which decamped with investors' money and if not, the reasons therefore?

(d) if not, the reasons therefor and date on which the ceiling was last revised?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) Under Section 88 of the Income-tax Act, an assessee is entitled to a tax rebate of 20% of sums contributed to specified saving schemes, insurance etc. The overall limit of Rs. 60,000/- under this provision also includes the amount of repayment of House Building Advance upto a maximum limit of Rs. 10.000/-.

The Government considers the limits in the ceiling of the overall investment permissible under the provision as part of budget exercise every year. The amount permissible for deduction of repayment of House Building Advance is also examined in the context of other saving instruments that are eligible for rebate. The Government response, if any, will be contained in the budget proposal.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) Does not arise in view of (a) & (b) above. The ceiling limit of Rs, 10.000/- has not been revised since the Fiance Act, 1990.

Hard Decisions

2059. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that the Prime Minister has been reminding people to face "hard decesions"; if so, the details in this regard;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the Prime Minister has been saying "the days of populism are over"; and

(c) if so, what is the implication of these statements?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) to (c) The Prime Minister's remarks reflect the overall approach to the economic management of the country. The trends in the economy are closely monitored and are under constant review and appropiate decisions are taken in the light of emerging trends as and when necessary.

Steps taken by insurance companies to face Competition

2060. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state the steps taken by the State Owned Insurance Companies to face competition after the sector is opened for private enterprises?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): The Life Insurance Corporation of India, General Insurance Corporation of India and the four subsidiary companies have taken adequate measures to face the competition after the sector is opened for private enterprises. The steps already taken/proposed to be taken by LIC includes upgradation to technology including computerisation in all branches, Metro Area Network and Interactive Voice Response System in eight metropolitan centres, delegation of powers for quicker servicing and claims settlement to improve servicing standards to the customer, development of skilled personnel through appropriate training method, introduction of additional products to cater to the different segments of the society, additional channels of distribution and restructuring of the marketing structure greater degree of professionalism in the management of investment, appointment of consultant for suggesting steps to be taken to face competition etc. GIC and the subsidiaries have initiated several steps to improve customer focus and to provide quality of service which inter alia include computerisation of operations, adoption of Citizen's charter evidencing commitment to meeting customer-related requirments, offering wide range of product choices and customized covers, focus